

## THOSE BLUE AND WHITE MAGNETS

by

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### Introduction

The Blue and White Magnets were born not from choice but necessity. Early in the first world war the renowned red dye used for the covers of the original Magnets became difficult to obtain. Blue ink on white covers was the war-time substitute, and - like a lot of war-time makeshifts - it lingered on for a long while after the cessation of hostilities.

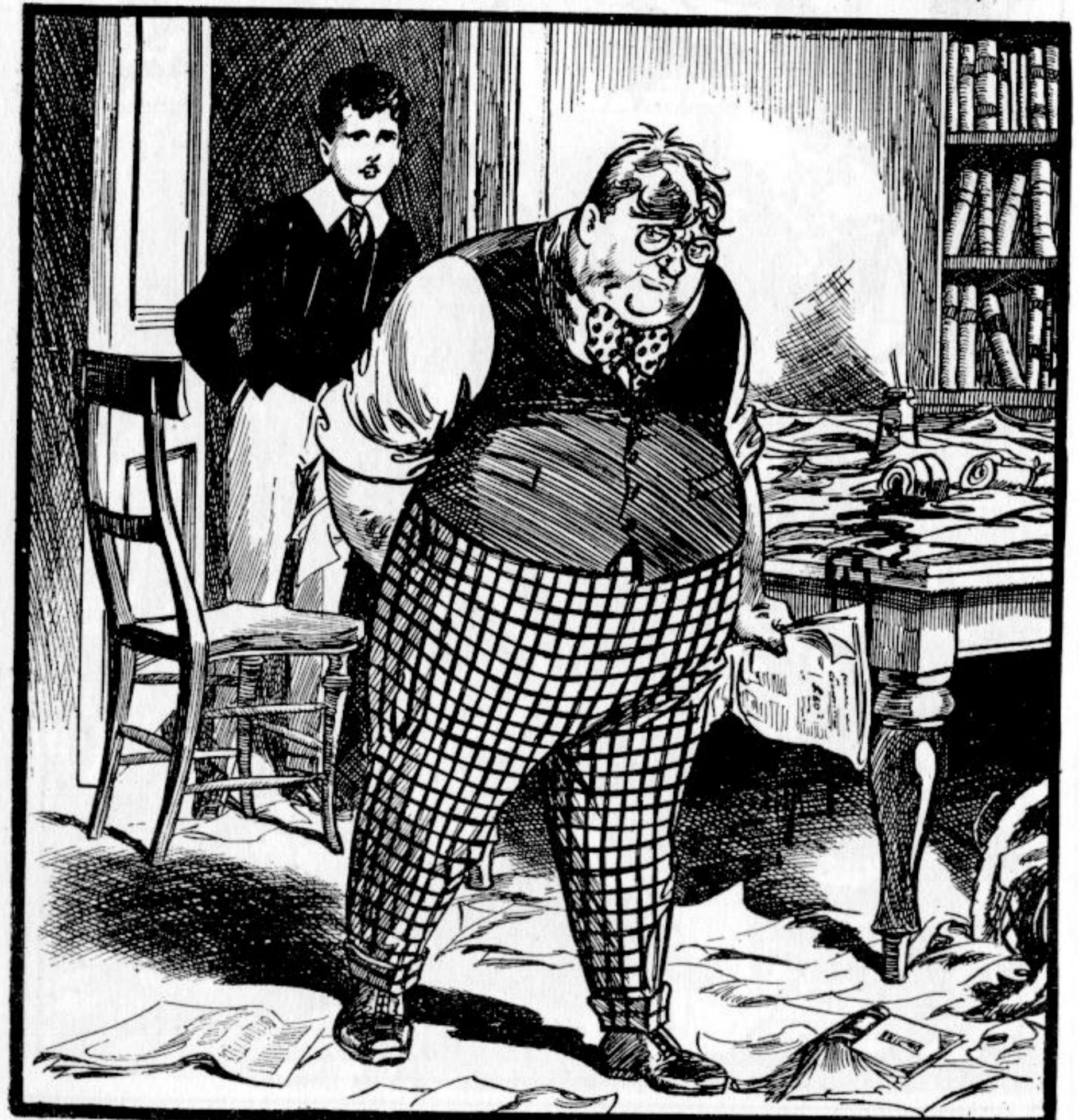
This era of the Magnet was in fact the least satisfactory of all, for a number of different reasons. At times during the war Charles Hamilton was not always available to turn out the weekly story, and on occasions the substitute writers were so taxed for inspiration that C.H. Chapman used to execute a number of illustrations around which they would concoct a story (shades of the Pickwick Papers indeed!) Later, when Pentelow took over the editorship, Charles Hamilton's stories would be deliberately set aside in order to make way for Pentelow's own effusions. Under his regime, substitute stories often appeared in preference to those by Charles Hamilton.

The war brought other vicissitudes. The paper shortage drastically reduced the length of the stories, even though the print was reduced in size. The uncertainty of the author's movements and general wartime factors all tended to take some of the shine off his stories; the leisurely pre-war world was indeed gone.

In all these circumstances, the wonder is that the Magnet kept going at all. Yet it did, and it was during the latter part of the war that it out-stripped the circulation

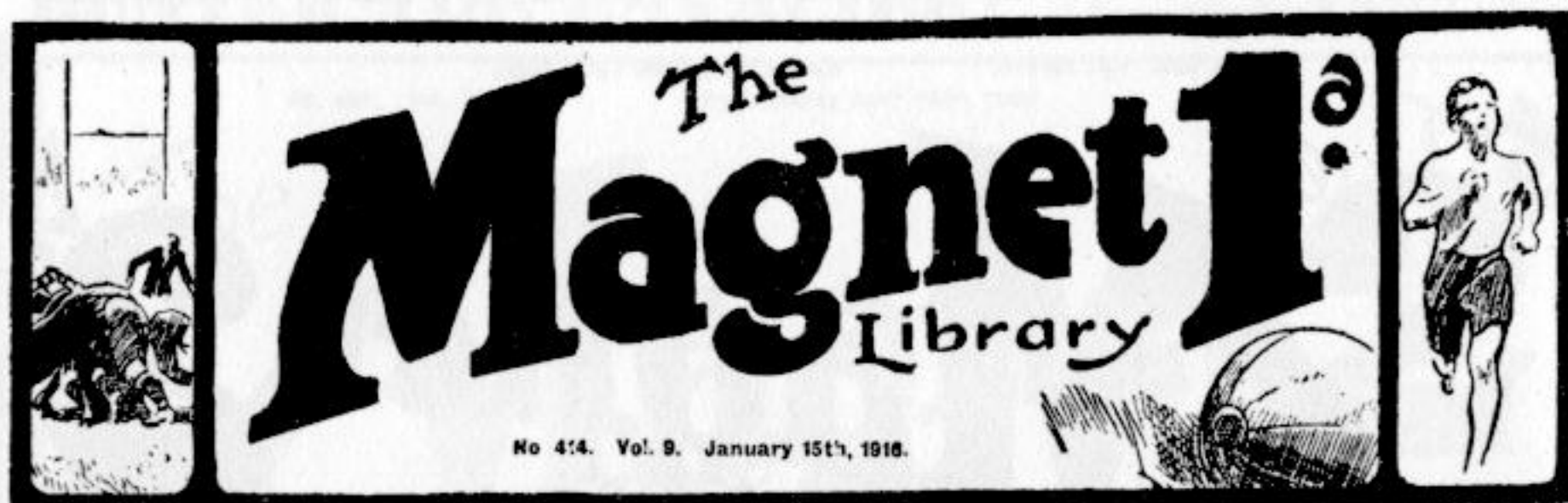
## "BUNTER, THE BARD!"

(Bunter not only writes poetry, but he TALKS it! See inside.)



**BILLY BUNTER WAS DETERMINED TO WIN THE PRIZE!**

(A humorous incident from the grand long complete school story inside.)



## THE FAMOUS FIVE HOLD THE FORT

(A stirring scene in "Bob Cherry's Challenge!" the great school tale in this issue.)

of its older competitor - and at that time superior paper - the Gem. After this somewhat gloomy introduction it may well be that some collectors new to the period will be agreeably surprised at the fare the Blue and White Magnet can provide. At all events, let us begin by examining the last part of the volume for 1915 and see what the Magnet of that time has to offer.

### 1915 - New Bottles for the Old Wine

The end of the red cover did not portend any immediate change - indeed it was only the cover that distinguished the new stories from the old. Coker had the honour of featuring in the first Blue and White Magnet, No. 397 dated 18th September, 1915. "Coker's Canadian Cousin" was expected to call en route for Flanders, but Skinner hired a seedy actor to impersonate cousin James, much to Coker's discomfiture. No. 398 saw the juniors engaged in a short-story competition. Manuscripts went astray in a very odd manner, and at one stage Bunter even suspected Mr. Quelch of boning his war story entitled "Through Mud and Blood". Loder was the villain of the piece the following week, at war with the Remove, who found a surprising ally in Coker, "The Champion of the Oppressed".

No. 401 saw "Bunter's Anti-Tuck Campaign". He had been punished by the Remove for guzzling in wartime, and he turned the tables on them for a while by leading a campaign to go without meals. The wrath of the Remove descended upon him with poetic justice when it was discovered that he was eating on the sly.

Sir Hilton Popper was kidnapped by German spies in No. 402, but the following week saw a story more in the usual vein, in which Cecil Snaith of the Shell was expelled. How he stole money from the Remove dormitory and attempted to throw suspicion on a member of that form, only to be foiled by a relentless cross-examination at the end made a fine dramatic story in typical Hamiltonian style. It was Fishy who was "Going the Pace" in No. 404, this time as an amateur bookmaker, only to find his cheating exposed in

the end by the Caterpillar.

A ghost from the past was Friedrich Falke in No. 406. He had done his best when secretary to Johnny Bull's uncle to get Johnny disgraced (Nos. 367/8). On that occasion Vernon-Smith had been his tool, but this time he chose the detestable Snoop. The plot was foiled with the aid of Kipps and the Bounder.

No. 407 entitled "The Jape of the Season" was a complete contrast, being written in Charles Hamilton's best humorous vein. In it we learn that Mr. Quelch had never married because he had been disappointed in love many years ago. To rectify this sad state of affairs Skinner inserted an advertisement in the matrimonial columns of the Friardale Gazette to the effect that a lonely form-master of pleasing personal appearance and affectionate disposition wished to meet a kindred soul. Mr. Quelch was quite surprised at the behaviour of the succession of middle-aged ladies who visited him that afternoon. Another humorous episode occurred the following week when Rake formed a rival football team and was beaten by Wharton's team disguised as girls.

The Christmas Double Number in No. 409 is one of those mysteries which beset Magnet collectors. Its first three chapters are full of Hamiltonianisms but the sparkle of the real Hamiltonian story is completely missing, and it is not surprising that this story was once classed as an imitation by the collector who compiled the list of these stories. With chapter four, however, the tale of "Harry Wharton & Co.'s Pantomime" revives. How the juniors spent the Christmas playing in pantomime at Lantham to send comforts to the soldiers at the front, and how Frank Nugent fell in love with Conchita, the Fairy Queen (who disappointingly turned out to be 37 years old and engaged to the stage manager) is all related with that cheerful kindness that was the hallmark of the best red Magnet stories.

Bunter shewed up at his worst in "Bunter the Masher" in No. 410. He was receiving letters from Marjorie Hazeldene and meeting her on the cliffs, giving everyone

to understand that Marjorie had succumbed to his fatal fascination ("Girls like a chap with a good figure"). In point of fact, he had told Marjorie that her brother owed him money, and she was endeavouring to meet the non-existent debt. Bob Cherry was in the depths of despair until the truth of the matter came to light.

#### 1916 - All Quiet on the Home Front

1916 started off well with No. 412 which was dated for New Year's Day. Entitled "Hazeldene's Honour", it was a story about Snoop's attempt to get Hazeldene discredited and so win his place in goal for the match against Highcliffe - the ulterior motive being to lose the match and win a bet with Ponsonby. This was the sort of story that Charles Hamilton did so well; perhaps a little far-fetched in ingenuity, but nonetheless fine dramatic entertainment for war-weary readers.

Stories about Fisher T. Fish were usually amusing; his plots always went awry, but his schemes were fun while they lasted. At this stage in the war, however, the Americans were still "too proud to fight", and the prevailing anti-American feeling was epitomised in the stories about the Yankee schoolboy who now ceased to be funny and became downright unpleasant. "The Schoolboy Speculator" in No. 413 attempted to buy up all the woollen goods in the district in order to re-sell them at a profit to organisations sending comforts to the front. Later, in No. 420, he was sending anonymous threatening letters to Mr. Quelch.

Vernon-Smith had been a reformed character for some while now, but Mr. Quelch had some mental reservations about the genuineness of his reform. So when in No. 418 Cecil Snaith re-appeared and associated with the Bounder, the Remove master felt (quite wrongly, as it turned out) that his suspicions were justified. This was an interesting story in a familiar vein. "Coker's Engagement" in No. 419 is notable as a story by Charles Hamilton featuring Phyllis Howell, the creation of a substitute writer.

Phyllis featured in another story in No. 423 in which Rattenstein, a German prince who had arrived in the Remove the previous week, engineered a series of quarrels and misunderstandings which she managed to put right.

Minor characters were featured quite often in these days. In No. 425 Micky Desmond was elated to find a Sandwich Island stamp in his collection worth £1,000, only to be dismayed later to discover it was merely a copy.

Snoop's father was a guest in one of His Majesty's Establishments, and in No. 428 we were introduced to another convict, this time Carne's father who had escaped from a local prison. Carne thought his father had a post in the Colonial Service, and by a quirk of fate it was Carne who gave the information that led to the recapture of Convict 27. In the end it turned out that Mr. Carne was innocent (unlike Mr. Snoop), the real villain being Mr. Black who was temporary maths master while Mr. Lascelles was at the front. The following week Coker decided to assist the law and round up a local man suspected of dodging conscription. The result was a thousand lines and detention for four half-holidays.

Two weeks later saw Billy Bunter masquerading as "The Hero of Greyfriars". Bob Cherry saved Sir Hilton Popper's niece from a train, but had had to keep quiet about it as he had been breaking detention at the time. Bunter saw no reason not to claim the glory, and at the same time he sent Sir Hilton a bill for £7.18.0. in respect of damage done to clothes by collision with a locomotive. When the truth came to light Bunter confided to his form-master that, under the circumstances, he was willing to let the matter drop, but Mr. Quelch did not seem to agree.

No. 433 saw Rattenstein "Kicked Out of the School" after the failure of his plot to get Wharton expelled, while "Frank Nugent's Folly" in No. 434 was in lending the cricket club funds to Snoop who promised faithfully to return them at the end of the week; fortunately for Nugent, the Bounder came to the rescue in an anonymous manner. No. 435 saw Loder betting against the school

cricket team, and, after an unpleasant story about a German spy in No. 437, Wibley starred the following week in one of his many impersonations of Monsieur Charpentier who had become involved in betting transactions with Mr. Banks.

Billy Bunter's cousin Wally, who was so like him in appearance if not in any other way, had already made his bow in red Magnet days (No. 333). In No. 439 he re-appeared to win a cricket match for the Remove, though not before Billy had nearly lost the match by pretending to be his cousin. A fortnight later saw the Removites on the land, helping a farmer whose hands had joined the army. Lord Mauleverer was in charge of a cart, but he upset the milk and eggs in the ditch, broke a wheel, and let the horse bolt. Bunter knocked over some hives in his search for honey, whilst Skinner and Snoop had a smoking party in the barn and set it alight. Charles Hamilton could be very amusing in these days, but he did not often allow himself such a free rein.

A fine story (which looked forward to the Courtfield Cracksman series) was "Sticking to his Guns" in No. 442 in which Vernon-Smith effected the capture of Slippery Jim, a notorious burglar who cracked the safes of all the best houses in the neighbourhood. Another fine tale with a foretaste of the future was "A Split in the Study" in No. 446 in which Wharton's hasty temper led him to quarrel with Nugent - a side to his character which was to be more fully developed in the two Rebel series.

In No. 444 the school saw Mr. Linley for the first time as a result of a trick of Skinner's, a joke which misfired; a few days later Wibley punished Skinner by disguising himself as an old freak and arriving as Skinner's wealthy uncle Joseph who had made his money in the fried fish business.

Large holiday gatherings with representatives from Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Rookwood, and Highcliffe were all the vogue at this time, and the assembly in No. 450 was at Eastwood House, the villain of the piece being Captain

Punter, an old friend from blue Gem days. Another echo from the blue Gem was "The Stolen Study" in Magnet No. 452. Wharton and Nugent were late in arriving back at the school, and found Study No. 1 bagged by Bolsover, Fish, and Bunter, but all came right in the end, of course.

Smithy's reformation had never convinced many at Greyfriars, and, when Mornington of Rookwood arrived in a thousand guinea motor car to pay Smithy a visit, the stage was all set for an adventure which nearly had a disastrous end for the Bounder. That he was not expelled, despite the efforts of Ponsonby and Mornington, was due to Harry Wharton.

No. 456 is really an historical document. It relates how Skinner and Co. systematically set to work to drive Herr Gans out of his mind; particularly interesting is the light it sheds on the public attitude to the Germans at that time. Herr Gans was a Saxon who resented Prussian ascendancy, and so it was possible to distinguish him from the Huns.

The substitute writers were given a rest at this time, and readers were treated to a fairly long run of genuine Hamiltonian stories: "Mauleverer's Detective" in No. 457 was employed to find his missing wallet; "Coker's Spy" in No. 458 turned out to be a drunken longshoreman from Pegg; Temple's attempts to make the Fourth Form team the junior eleven went awry in No. 459; while "Billy Bunter's Reformation" in No. 460 was brought about by another visit by Cora, Mr. Quelch's plump niece. In No. 364 Bunter had saved her from a bull, and in No. 460 he managed to drag her out of the river; but the reformation did not last long:-

"It was exactly three days before Bunter made his first attempt to raise cash on a Postal Order he was expecting - a Postal Order from one of his titled relations, as he explained. And the same evening he had occasion to stop and tie his shoelace as he was passing Mr. Quelch's keyhole. So, amazing as it had been, there was an unfortunate lack of per-

manency about Billy Bunter's Reformation."

Double numbers did not always live up to the high hopes entertained of them. There were notable exceptions to this rule, like "The Mystery of the Painted Room" in the Gem, but only too often a long holiday story was not so good as a shorter story in a school setting. "The House on the Heath" in Magnet No. 461 was quite an enthralling story about the capture of a German spy at Christmastide but one cannot help wishing it could have been a school story instead.

Bunter was in trouble in No. 462 with a mysterious fiver; it was not until half way through the story that the reader was told it had come from a money-lender, but luckily Monty Newland was able to get him out of trouble. The "Foul Play" in No. 463 was engineered by Ponsonby - Carne was to drug the first eleven to win a large bet on the match, but Ponsonby (who had tried a similar scheme in No. 147) was as unlucky this time as he had been on the previous occasion.

#### 1917 - Business as Usual

The New Year began with Fishy "Getting Rich Quick" in No. 465 by gambling on the Stock Exchange with Mauleverer's money. This was not such a bitter satire as No. 413, and was altogether much more enjoyable. This story was followed by two connected with the war: No. 467 was about Bob Cherry's cousin Paul Tyrell, who was evading the call-up, while No. 469 was an amusing trifle about "Billy Bunter's Big Brother" at the front, an imaginary relative who was in desperate need of money for comforts.

With No. 470 the number of pages was cut from 20 to 16 (excluding covers,) and the number of columns increased from 2 to 3, this latter innovation becoming a permanent feature of the Magnet. No. 470, entitled "The Fellow Who Funked", related how Nugent was unjustly sent to Coventry by the form.

A new boy with a difference was Mauleverer's relation Sir Jimmy Vivian in No. 471. Like Joe Frayne of St. Jim's, he was rescued from the slums of London. Bunter, Skinner, and Fish were horrified at a penniless baronet who dropped his aspirates, and it was not long before Skinner was plotting against him.

Mr. Bunter arrived at the school in No. 474 and informed his hopeful son that he could soon claim the title 'Viscount Bunter', whilst his younger brother would become the Hon. Samuel Bunter. Mr. Bunter had been assured by a swindler that, after a certain amount of costly research, he could lay claim to an extinct earldom. It was not long before the swindler was shewn up, and Viscount Bunter became a commoner again, giving up D'Arcy's accent and Ponsonby's sneer which he had so assiduously cultivated.

Kipps and Mauleverer both starred in "The Prefect's Plot" in No. 475 (which was in fact written before No. 471, because the editor had to add in the story an explanation of Vivian's absence). Loder was trying to blacken Wharton's name in order to squeeze money out of Lord Mauleverer, but he was unlucky. A somewhat delayed sequel to Nos. 467 and 471 appeared in No. 483 entitled "Sir Jimmy's Secret" which dealt with the unwitting part Vivian played in concealing property which Tyrell was suspected of stealing.

One suspects that Charles Hamilton had a sneaking affection for Skinner, who could be amusingly witty at times; No. 485 began with Skinner and Snoop sewing up the sleeves of Gwynne's new overcoat ("Must do something to keep off war-worry - What?") and the theme developed into a feud between Carne and the Famous Five, in which Skinner and Gwynne both played a large part.

Series were few and far between in these days, and so the fine one about Vernon-Smith in Nos. 487-490 was all the more noteworthy. There had been a rather sensational series about the Bounder in red Magnet days about his plot to get all his enemies expelled, but this series was far

more restrained and subtle than that. Owing to some misunderstanding, Mr. Quelch unjustly suspected Vernon-Smith of backsliding, and in the end the Bounder decided to have the game as well as the name. After letting the team down he was dropped, and he played a number of rotten tricks on the cricket eleven, but in spite of it all he never relapsed into the unmitigated scoundrel of old, and the series ended with him on friendly terms with the Famous Five again, though no longer a reformed character. The only drawback was the further reduction of pages to 16 (including covers) which must have abbreviated this splendid quartet of stories.

Vivian featured again in No. 491, in which an old friend from the slums came down to see him, and would have been arrested as a thief owing to Skinner's plotting had not the Bounder forestalled him. The following week saw Mr. Snoop, the escaped convict, transformed into Private Smith in the army, whilst No. 493 related how the Bounder joined Ponsonby's team "Against His Own Side". Vernon-Smith starred again in No. 494; Skinner was still anxious for revenge for being foiled in No. 491, and he did his best to get the Bounder expelled, but his trickery came to nought, once more.

Hurree Singh stepped into the limelight in No. 496, in which he was suspected of frequenting the Cross Keys, but the culprit turned out to be an old friend of his called Kuri Din. Unfortunately, before this became known, Johnny Bull refused to take the Nabob's word that he was not the hypocrite nearly everyone thought him, and in No. 497 they were "Parted Pals" until Smithy hit upon a scheme to restore mutual harmony between them. Comic relief was provided by Coker the following week, when he set himself the task of organising the neighbourhood to further the war effort.

Rebellions were not unknown at Greyfriars, but hitherto they had not been accorded the dignity of a series. This omission was rectified in Nos. 501-5 dealing with the new headmaster, Mr. Jeffreys, and his henchman Schwarz who

became Remove master. This splendid series was very famous in its day, setting as it did the pattern for all future series of this kind to follow.

"Ponsonby's Pal" in No. 507 was Jack Wingate; Ponsonby was not seeking the delights of the company of a third form fag, but rather an indirect way of getting revenge upon the Captain of Greyfriars. No. 508 saw the aftermath of the Remove rebellion; Coker delivered an ultimatum to Mr. Prout, then temporary headmaster, to the effect that unless he was made a prefect the Fifth would start a barring-out against Prout. Somehow or other, Coker was unable to recruit any followers for his campaign.

There was "An Old Boy at Greyfriars" in No. 510, a fine story about Levison's appearance in the St. Jim's eleven which was visiting Greyfriars. Skinner had laid a heavy bet on the home side, and resorted to desperate measures to save his money. Levison was still at Greyfriars the following week and was able to do Smithy good turn when he was being blackmailed by Jerry Hawke.

No. 515 was unusual in that Charles Hamilton featured two of Pentelow's characters in the story - Flip and Flap Derwent. The year ended with more news of Kuri Din, Hurree Singh's childhood friend, now at Redclyffe. In No. 516 he was shewn up in his true colours, and Hurree Singh remarked "I have dismissed Kuri Din from friendship and from memory".

#### 1918 - The Top of the Tree

The New Year saw the advent of the last new boy who was destined to play any significant part in the Greyfriars stories - Tom Redwing. The Bounder went sailing in a storm, and was rescued by a young sailor from Hawkscliff. Tom later ran into Clavering who was destined for the Remove but wanted to join the army, and they decided to exchange names, Redwing going to Greyfriars as Clavering, and Clavering joining up as Private Redwing. How Redwing earned the enmity of Ponsonby and Skinner, and how Vernon-Smith did his best to shield him until the truth

came to light was told in a very fine series in Nos. 517-9 and 521-2. Redwing left Greyfriars at the end of the series, but it was certain that more was to be heard of him.

It is difficult to know what to say about No. 520 "A Very Gallant Gentleman", the only story by a substitute writer which need be considered in the course of this review. This celebrated story by J.N. Pentelow in which he killed off Courtney of the Sixth and made Valence leave the school played havoc with the set-up in the Sixth Form. The story was not in the Greyfriars tradition at all, but that would not have mattered had Pentelow written his heroics about two seniors whose names he could have made up for the occasion. Unfortunately Courtney and Valence were well-defined characters about whom some splendid tales had been written in red Magnet days, and their departure was a serious loss from the point of view of the stories. The characters were never replaced, and the Sixth Form was never so interesting again.

After Herr Gans had featured in Nos. 525 and 526 in a series about a German spy, Coker came to the fore again in No. 528 in which he decided to perpetrate jokes incessantly in a patriotic attempt to keep the home front from collapsing.

The second series about Redwing was published in Magnets 530-3, and constituted a fine quartet of stories. Redwing was far too proud to accept Mr. Vernon-Smith's offer to pay his fees at Greyfriars, and so the Bounder suggested to his father that a scholarship should be founded by an anonymous donor. Redwing eventually won the scholarship, but not before both Skinner and Ponsonby had done their best to deter him and disgrace him.

It was Ogilvy who was "Saved from Shame" in No. 534. He had the honour of having six brothers in khaki, and the arrival of Captain Malcolm Ogilvy from the front was opportune in saving Donald Ogilvy from being expelled. Another soldier on leave from the trenches was Snoop's father, alias Private Smith in Magnets 536 and 537.

Mr. Snoop succeeded in winning the King's Pardon, and was able to rejoin the army under his own name.

Another minor character was featured in No. 539, which described Elliott's troubles during his last week at Greyfriars before he left to go to Canada. It was Bolsover, his study-mate, who came to his rescue and saved him from the plottings of a cardsharp named Smiles. Elliott's place in Study No. 10 was taken by Napoleon Dupont the following week, a pleasant episodic story with no plot.

"William the Good" in No. 541 was, unbelievably, Billy Bunter; as a result of pressure from the Remove he cunningly reformed himself into such a virtuous prig that they were glad to see him change back into his old self once more - a humorous theme, this, but far better treated at St. Jim's when Baggy Trimble reformed in Gems 927 and 928.

Pentelow, the editor, often re-arranged the sequence of the stories. No. 542 was a sequel to No. 539, and written before Dupont came to Greyfriars. "Bolsover's Enemy" was Smiles, the cardsharp, who tried to use Bunter as a tool in his attempt to get Bolsover expelled. The following week saw the return of Redwing's father, who was thought to have been torpedoed and drowned.

If Dupont's arrival at the school had not been made the subject of a notable series, the same could not be said of Aubrey Angel's advent upon the Greyfriars scene, which was recorded in Magnets 546-8. Angel of the Fourth came nearer to Ponsonby than any other character for complete and utter villainy. Hazeldene and Sir Jimmy Vivian were two of his dupes, but it did not take long for the scales to fall from their eyes. Comic relief was provided in No. 551; "Coker's Campaign" was aimed at getting Wingate deposed and himself appointed as school captain.

The third Redwing series in Nos. 533-6 was the finest of them all. Redwing shared study No. 11 with Snoop

and Scott, whilst Skinner was in No. 4 with Vernon-Smith. Out of sheer obstinacy Skinner refused to change with Redwing, whose attempts to swot for a prize in Study No. 11 were continually ruined by the shady trio. The Bounder evolved a deep-laid scheme, as a result of which Skinner was forced to exchange studies, but to his chagrin Redwing refused to move in, since Skinner had moved out unwillingly. This rebuff brought out all the evil in Vernon-Smith's character, and he even went so far as to imply that it was only his wealth that made Redwing desire his friendship. When the Bounder has repented, he found that Redwing was too deeply hurt to forget the matter, even though he broached the topic after Redwing had rendered him another service:-

"You don't want to be friends again?" he asked.

"I suppose you feel bound to say that," answered Redwing calmly. "I've told you that there's nothing to make a fuss about."

"Will you answer my question?"

"If you like, certainly. No, I don't want to be friends again."

The Bounder winced.

The answer was simply and quietly spoken, and it was evidently in earnest. There was no resentment in Tom Redwing's tone or look, only quiet seriousness. At that moment, more than ever before, the Bounder realised what he had lost in losing the friendship of the sailor lad. It had been lightly lost. It was not to be so lightly regained.

Skinner's persecution of Redwing came to the knowledge of Mr. Quelch, who ordered them to change studies - a move which came too late in the day. Mr. Vernon-Smith arrived at the school, and was exceedingly wrathful when he learned by accident that Redwing had refused his son's friendship, whilst Redwing decided to give up his scholarship when he came to know how it was founded. The



threads were gathered together in a masterly manner in No. 556 in which it became known that Mr. Vernon-Smith was bankrupt. Redwing immediately offered his friendship to the Bounder again, and the ruse also succeeded in convincing the millionaire that his son's friend was genuine, while Redwing was prevailed upon to remain at Greyfriars. This splendid character series was never equalled in the Blue and White Magnets. Nothing half so fine had ever appeared in the old paper before, and nothing so good was to appear for some time to come. Redwing's character was etched with such revealing certainty that he came to life in a way that Linley and Penfold and the other poor juniors never succeeded in doing, probably because they had no friend like Vernon-Smith to act as a contrast.

"The Missing Masterpiece" in No. 558 was Hoskins' march in F Major, which had been hidden by Hobson whose loyalty to his chum could not stand the thought of having it played to him twice daily for an indefinite period. The following two weeks were concerned with the misadventures of a new boy, Richard Hilary, whose father was a conscientious objector. "Coker's Latest" in No. 561 was ventriloquism, while No. 563 saw Snoop in a new light, challenging Angel to a fight for making sarcastic references to Corporal Snoop.

In No. 561 Billy Bunter had made more than one reference to his cousin Wally's impending change of circumstances which was to be known the following week, but it was not until the last story of the year - No. 568 - that the prologue to the long Wally Bunter series appeared. Billy ended the year by getting into debt with Jerry Hawke, the bookmaker.

#### 1919 - Aftermath

"Wally Bunter's Luck" in No. 569 was that his employer had decided to send him to his old school, St. Jim's, for having rendered him a special service. Wally would have preferred to go to Greyfriars and renew his acquaintance with the Famous Five, while Billy was finding

Greyfriars was getting too hot for him. Wally was accordingly inclined to accept Billy's suggestion that they should change places. For the next few weeks Wally was doing his best to live down his cousin's unsavoury reputation, and after that the initial impetus of the plot seems to have spent itself, for Wally became pushed somewhat into the background by the trouble with Highcliffe, the reformation of Snoop on his father's release from the army, and the feud with Loder.

In the meanwhile, Billy Bunter's career at St. Jim's was being told in the Gem commencing with No. 571, and the twin series came to an end with No. 585 of both papers. Billy had now made St. Jim's too hot for himself, and he returned precipitately to Greyfriars, leaving Wally no option but to proceed to St. Jim's to face another accumulation of wrath for his cousin's misdeeds. In the end, Wally left St. Jim's to take up a position in Paris. Incidentally, it may be noted that stories by substitute writers were interpolated into both the Magnet and the Gem series, the only time this was ever done in the history of both papers.

Napoleon Dupont caused a stir in Nos. 586-7 when he went for Bolsover with a rapier, and then ran away from the school. Bunter featured in another pair of stories in Nos. 589/90, having found some stolen silver which Fishy was keen to auction for him, but it turned out to belong to Sir Hilton Popper. Bunter was the centre of attraction again in No. 593, in which he turned Bolshevik until he was cured with a dose of his own medicine.

After another of Coker's newspaper advertisements had gone wrong in No. 597, readers were re-introduced to the seedy actor Montgomery Snooks who had previously impersonated Coker's Canadian cousin. In No. 600 entitled "The Hero's Homecoming" he swathed himself in bandages and arrived as Larry Lascelles.

No. 612 was timed to co-incide with the revival of the Greyfriars Herald which was just commencing as a

separate paper for the second time. In "The Herald's Rival" (the rival being Bunter's Weekly) Harry Wharton telephoned Fleetway House and Bunter spoke of doing ghost work for Martin Clifford in a story which struck a somewhat curious note.

It was now time for another Redwing series and, like all the others, it was first-class. Nos. 613-5 related how Redwing was detained on the afternoon of a football match, and the Bounder gave him a false message that Mr. Quelch had excused him. Skinner informed Mr. Quelch, and Vernon-Smith was flogged. (It is interesting to note that Wharton was shocked by Smithy's behaviour; he would not have been so shocked ten years later). The rest of the series was devoted to the Bounder's plot to get Skinner a flogging by way of revenge, but it was made clear to Vernon-Smith before the end that the game he was playing was not worth the candle.

"The Rise and Fall of William Gosling" in No. 617 came about when he answered a matrimonial advertisement by a wealthy widow with a prosperous public house. He began by cheeking the boys and finished up by patronising Dr. Locke, who very kindly forgave him when his high hopes proved groundless.

#### 1920 - Low Water

It is known from Charles Hamilton's autobiography that he joined the army towards the end of the war. The results of this are clearly seen in the Gem and the Magnet which were flooded with substitute stories in 1920. Only nine complete stories of his were published in the Magnet in that year, plus No. 652 which will be considered in due course.

The first genuine story for 33 weeks was "Bunter the Bankrupt" in No. 640 dated 15.5.20. This has the distinction of being the only story Charles Hamilton ever had to put aside because he was unable to see how the plot should progress. With chapter 3 the story takes a somewhat different turn and it is certain that, in more

normal times, the first two chapters would not have been allowed to stand.

"Billy Bunter's Speculation" in No. 643 was in selling Toddy's bike in order to raise funds to invest on the Stock Exchange, and it was Bunter who was "Chumming with Loder" in No. 649, though the friendship was all one-sided, being founded on some incriminating documents Bunter had acquired. Bunter also featured in No. 651 when he disguised himself as Bessie in order to secure admittance at a feast at which he scoffed the lion's share.

No. 652 is the mystery story of the year. Entitled "Bunter's Baby", it relates how a woman asked Bunter to mind a pram, and the trouble he was caused as a result. Here and there may be found parts written by Charles Hamilton, but most of it is by a substitute writer. How it was concocted is one of the many puzzles of this unsatisfactory year.

The only series Charles Hamilton wrote for the Magnet in 1920 was about the schoolboy film stars in Nos. 660-4. A party of Greyfriars fellows, under the care of Mr. Quelch, went to stay at Hawthorne Park where Mr. Cyrus Hunker was making films. This was an odd melodramatic sort of series, with Wingate in the lead. How he fell in love with the actress, Elsie Mainwaring, is recounted in a manner which harks back to red Magnet days. This was indeed the last of the love stories in the Magnet.

#### 1921 - The Turn of the Tide

Charles Hamilton's contributions to the Magnet in 1921 were numerically about the same as in 1920, but the stories shewed a notable improvement in quality which heralded well for the future.

"Thin Bunter" came in No. 682 after a sequence of 17 substitute stories, but it was well worth waiting for, as was "Deaf Bunter" in No. 689, the titles of both these

stories speaking for themselves. The trio was completed by "Bunter's Picnic" in No. 693, in which he intercepted a letter to Wharton, and then decided to accept an invitation in his name - a piece of trickery which came to nought.

The first holiday series to appear in the Magnet was the caravanning series in Nos. 704-9, and a remarkably good series it was. The first two numbers concerned Coker and the secret of the caravan, but after that the individual stories ceased to have any connecting link, and were probably all the better for it. In No. 706 Mauleverer became entangled with Ponsonby & Co., in No. 707 they met Jack Drake and an escaped convict, in No. 708 they persuaded Colonel Wharton to let them take the caravan over to France, and in No. 709 Bunter sold the horse and bicycle to raise cash to gamble in the casino. Typical of the gaiety of this series is Bunter's excuse to Colonel Wharton when that gentleman's cigar had exploded in his face:-

"Besides, it was only a joke," gasped Bunter. "I never hoped that it would blow your moustache off, sir!"

"What?"

"I don't think that a white moustache looks idiotic, sir, and ought to be blown off. Not at all!"

This was the Bunter who was to become such a popular character in years to come, the fatuous ass, not the scheming rascal.

"Bunter's Very Latest" in No. 715 was a pretence of blindness which almost deceived Mr. Quelch, while "The Mystery of the Christmas Candles" in No. 723 was the last of the enlarged Christmas numbers, costing 2d in place of the usual 1½d, and having only four more pages than a normal number. It was a pale echo of the splendour of the Christmas Double Numbers of old, but it did at least sport a coloured cover.

## 1922 - High Water

"Billy Bunter's Big Bargain" in No. 729 was an old four-poster bedstead which he recklessly bid for at an auction and had knocked down to him. Bunter also starred in an excellent series in Nos. 737-9 in which he ran away from school to escape punishment and took refuge in St. Jim's and Rookwood. This must have been a popular theme, for Charles Hamilton wrote a story on similar lines for the 1927 Holiday Annual.

The rebellion which took place in Magnets 743-5 was unique in that it emanated from the Sixth Form. Sir Hilton Popper had prevailed upon Dr. Locke to resign, and his nominee, James Carnforth, was appointed headmaster. Mr. Carnforth's idea was to instil discipline throughout the school commencing at the top, but the Sixth objected to being caned, and a barring-out took place in which the Remove later joined. Mr. Carnforth's regime lasted but three weeks, after which Dr. Locke agreed to return.

In No. <sup>748</sup>478 Bunter went to see a film entitled "The Clutch of the Crook" and was greatly impressed thereby. He even thought of using these methods on Mr. Quelch ("A bullet through the brain would bring him to his senses") but in the end it was Mr. Quelch who brought Bunter to his senses.

Timothy Perkins was a footman's son, but when his father acquired a fortune he came to Greyfriars and changed his name to Algernon de Vere. The story of the Snob of the Remove was told in Nos. 749-52, but the theme was not perhaps a very pleasant topic to work upon.

"Bunter's Raffle" in No. 753 was a gramophone bought on hire purchase, which he stated was a gift from a relative. Fisher T. Fish became involved in the raffle, and he engineered a deep-laid scheme to ensure that he won it, but it proved an empty victory, for the hire-purchase firm regained possession of the gramophone,

since Bunter had of course neglected to keep up the payments on it.

The last series to appear in the Blue and White Magnets was the one in Nos. 755-9 about Gideon Gaunt, the kidnapper, who pursued Mauleverer even on board the yacht *Silver Scud* when it was cruising on the high seas. This must be classed as one of the more successful mystery stories by Charles Hamilton; the identity of the criminal and the key to the mystery were by no means apparent, and, though this series cannot rank with the Mysterious X stories in the Blue Gem, it is at least a worthy runner-up.

"The Persecution of Mr. Prout" in No. 763 presented the Fifth Form master in a light similar to Mr. Greely at Rookwood. He became offended at hearing himself referred to as "old Prout" and the touchiness he displayed induced someone to insert an advertisement in the local paper in his name, asking for a cure for baldness. Nos. 764 and 765 related the tale of the Highcliffe match, the first number being concerned with Fishy's attempts to blackmail his way into the team, and the second number with Ponsonby's efforts to ruin the match. No. 766 was devoted to Loder's feud with the Famous Five, and his search for incriminating evidence against them, a theme which was more fully developed in the 1929 series. With this number, we may conclude this review of Charles Hamilton's contribution to the Blue and White Magnet, since No. 767 was by a substitute writer, and Nos. 768/9 formed the beginning of the Congo series the bulk of which was published in coloured cover days.

### Conclusion

The Blue and White Magnets make a strong impression on the reader, an impression of ridiculous letters in the editorial column from "anti-Magnetites", of exhortations to eat less bread; of dreadful photographs of loyal readers - schoolboys in eton-collars, youths in bowler hats, and men in khaki (where are they all now, I wonder?);

of outrageous advertisements which make one doubt the age of the readers of the Magnet - advertisements for a beauty cream designed to cure crow's feet, lines round the mouth, blackheads, wrinkles, and sallow complexion, advertisements for a permanent hair waver for men ("Mine curled at once" - Major), or for boys to be trained for posts in the establishments of noblemen. But these are, after all, only the trimmings. It is the stories themselves which matter.

The stories set a pattern quite different to those in the red Magnet and to those in coloured cover days. Series were the exception rather than the rule, as became the case later. On the other hand, the single stories were on the whole much better than they had been in red Magnet days; they lost in length, but gained in variety and originality of treatment. In particular, they featured far more members of the Remove than at any other time; the reader in those days could, after a few months, feel well-acquainted with nearly every member of the form. For instance, how often in more recent times have Snoop, Desmond, Dupont, Bulstrode, Ogilvy, and Bolsover played any real part? "But the stage was overcrowded" object some. "No, the stories were more individual and less streamlined" reply others. You pay your money and you take your choice.

One thing may be asserted without hesitation: this was the heyday of the Magnet. Better stories were to come, yes, but it was in this period that the Magnet outstripped the Gem in circulation and really reigned supreme. Everyone knew the Magnet well; the Thomson papers had not yet arrived on the scene to sow their seeds of destruction, and the only other competitors were Amalgamated Press papers many of them written by Charles Hamilton himself. The Magnet and the Gem were read by nearly every schoolboy and school girl instead of just the discriminating minority of later years. That the characters really lived, even then, is evidenced by the letter from the indignant reader who claimed that Skinner was his favourite character, and was being unfairly depicted by Frank Richards! How few authors

have been paid such a graceful compliment - that a character of his own imagination, and a minor one at that, could have an independent existence in the mind of the reader.

The paper shortage and the plethora of substitute stories both take some of the gilt off the gingerbread in this period, and it cannot be denied that some of the stories dealing with topics connected with the war leave an unpleasant taste in the mouth when re-read in happier times. It would be idle therefore to pretend that this transitional stage in the history of the Greyfriars saga was its finest hour. The best was yet to be, and the collector who has never even seen a Magnet of this period may nevertheless possess the pick of the Greyfriars stories. And yet it is not wholly irrational to cherish an affection for this, the popular period of the Magnet; in the three Redwing series and the Judge Jeffries series, together with a handful of individual stories, it had its days of triumph, and who are we, in the time when the Magnet is no more, to deny it its due honours?

Fools! For I also had my hour;  
One far fierce hour and sweet:  
There was a shout about my ears,  
And palms before my feet.

